

## Treatments of the Cuckoo in English Poetry

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The European or common cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), liked and disliked by many people in Europe, is one of the most written sky creatures in English poetry. People like the cuckoo, on the one hand, because its coming back to the Continent from South Africa after a long cold winter signifies the arrival of warm spring – the agreeable season generally believed to bring vitality, happiness, and hope; people dislike it, on the other, because its peculiarity of laying eggs in other birds' nests alludes to adultery – the immoral behavior bitterly condemned by the civilized world. For centuries, the cuckoo has been frequently written about by many English poets, great and lesser, on these two themes. Actually some cuckoo poems are treated with the former theme; some with the latter; and some with both. However, when dealing with the cuckoo in modern English poetry, it is the latter theme that is mostly employed.

To discuss the treatments of the cuckoo, I have selected one folk song, eleven old rhymes, and ten poems about the cuckoo by different poets of different periods to examine their attitudes towards the cuckoo.

First of all, let us view the famous "Cuccu Song," one of the earliest, if not the earliest English song, written by an unknown author in about the middle of the thirteenth century:

Sumer is icumen in;  
Lhude sing cuccu!  
Groweth sed, and bloweth med,  
And springeth the wude nu.  
Sing cuccu!

Ewe bleteth after lomb,  
Lhouth after calve cu;  
Bulluc sterteth, bucke verteth,  
Murie sing cuccu!